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SHÛT-ABNI, "THOSE OF STONE"

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Gilgamesh, seeking the "mouth of the rivers," had crossed the lion-infested desert, had reached the mountain Mashu guarded by scorpion men, one of whom told him of the tunnel twenty-four hours long which led through this mountain toward the sea of the setting sun, had made this dark journey, and was now in the pleasant garden by the seaside, over which presided the goddess Sidurisabîtu.

The way to Ut-napishtim? There is no path across the sea, no one but Shamash [the sun] is able to cross it. Deep are the waters of death. . . . What could you do when you reached the waters of death? But, Gilgamesh, there is Ur-shanabi, the boatman of Ut-napishtim, with whom are "those of stone," . . . cross over with him, if possible [*Gilgamesh Epic*, X, Col. II, 15 f.].

Gilgamesh sets out to find this boatman and comes upon his vessel before meeting him. For some reason, unknown to us (the text is badly broken), he smashes "those of stone." Ur-shanabi now appears and is willing to take Gilgamesh along with him to Ut-napishtim, but the broken "those of stone" raise difficulties. Gilgamesh is sent into the forest to cut down some poles (*parisi*), each sixty cubits in length. Ur-shanabi and Gilgamesh now board the vessel and set sail. A journey of a month and fifteen days brings them toward the end of the trip, and Ur-shanabi is on the lookout. Three more days and they are in the dangerous waters of death (so I interpret X, Col. III, end). Gilgamesh is ordered to take one of the poles he had cut, but to be careful that none of the waters of death touched his hands. Pole after pole is seized by Gilgamesh until a hundred and twenty are used up. The mast (better, perhaps, "yard," see below) is lowered as they near the shore. Ut-napishtim sees the ship drawing up, and says "Why are 'those of stone' broken, and why does one who does not belong there, ride in the ship?"

We pass over the meeting of Un-napishtim and Gilgamesh, as well as the former's account of the deluge and the reasons for his being among the immortals.

Gilgamesh fails in the test of warding off sleep, which is death, and must return to Uruk. At the request of his wife, Ut-napishtim gives Gilgamesh, among other things, a garment which will constantly renew itself until he has ended his journey home. Gilgamesh and Ur-shanabi now board the boat once more and set out. Again at the request of Ut-napishtim's wife, they are called back. "Gilgamesh lifted up the pole [*parisa*], and brought the ship to shore" (XI, 277 f.). He is told where to find the plant which will give perpetual youth, dives down to the *apsû* for it, and the return journey is resumed and brought to an end.

What are "those of stone"? Jensen, in *KB*, VI, 1, 473, thought of chests or other containers of stones, perhaps intended for ballast. Gressmann, in *Das Gilgamesch-Epos*, objects to this, since the broken *šût-abni* were replaced by the poles Gilgamesh was ordered to cut in the forest. So far, so good. But I find difficulty in following Gressmann any farther. The stone chests (*Steinkiste*), so he translates *šût-abni*, served as a bridge.

There was no landing stage, and there must be none, since no one was to cross to the other side [of the waters of death]. Swimming is impossible, for contact with the water brings death. Even the ship cannot pass through, since the raging stream "is swifter than lightning and faster." Ur-shanabi is in the habit of sinking wooden chests loaded with heavy stones, just as Alexander, at a later date, crossed the "Sandstream," which flows with water three days, and then three days with sand. This bridge has the advantage that after its use it would be removed by the stream itself and intruders would be kept out. Now that the stone chests had been smashed by Gilgamesh, there was nothing to do but build a suspension-bridge [*Hängebrücke*]: the hundred and twenty poles [*Stangen*], each sixty cubits in length, were bound together and were to serve as a landing bridge. Suddenly it is realized that the poles—together some 3,600 meters long—will not reach; the waters are wider than the boatman had estimated. Is all their effort to be of no avail, must Gilgamesh turn back? A moment of greatest tension! When their first fright is overcome, Gilgamesh and the boatman pull off their garments and take down the mast. Now the bridge is long enough, and the two cross the dangerous waters of death over the narrow suspension-

bridge, and reach their destination, the confluence of the streams, where dwells Ut-napishtim, the far-away.¹

Now, I believe in allowing poets all the poetic license they want. I admit that a hero like Gilgamesh, who was "two-thirds god and one-third man," must have performed many wonderful deeds. But a suspension-bridge, made by tying together a hundred and twenty tree-trunks, each sixty cubits long (total some 3,600 meters) and the ship's mast (say another sixty cubits long), and pushing them out from the side of a ship to the shore—well, my imagination is not equal to the task. Honestly, isn't Gressmann "spoofing" us?

But let us be serious. That there is absolutely nothing to this suspension-bridge explanation seems to me to follow from the account of the departure of Gilgamesh and Ur-shanabi after their stay with Ut-napishtim.

Gilgamesh and Ur-shanabi boarded the ship, the ship they cast [upon the raging flood], and sailed away;

"Gilgamesh has gone, he has worn himself out and plagued himself (?),

What will you give him that he may return to his land?"

And he lifted up the pole(?), namely Gilgamesh

(and) brought the ship near the shore [XI, 272-78. I have purposely quoted the Ungnad-Gressmann translation].

The first two lines of this passage are identical with the lines describing the *start* of Gilgamesh and Ur-shanabi from Siduri-sabitu's garden for the confluence of the streams where Ut-napishtim dwells (X, 148-49). Not only had the ship gone right up to Ut-napishtim's shore, but it starts out from there and returns again.²

It seems to me that the problem must be attacked in another way: that the one way to attack it is by asking the question "what was there about an ancient ship that was made of stone?" And the answer is, the anchors.

No doubt my argument would be more convincing to some if I now quoted extensively from the Greek and Latin. But I shall content myself with a few quotations from modern works. First

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 137 f.

² Certainly within hailing distance, for Ut-napishtim tells Gilgamesh how and where to find the plant which brings perpetual youth.

from the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Art., "Anchor."

The most ancient anchors consisted of large stones, baskets full of stones, sacks filled with sand, or logs of wood loaded with lead. Of this kind were the anchors of the ancient Greeks, which, according to Apollonius Rhodius and Stephen of Byzantium, were formed of stone; and Athenaeus states that they were sometimes made of wood. Such anchors held the vessel merely by their weight and by the friction along the bottom. . . . Every ship had several anchors; the largest, corresponding to our sheet anchor, was only used in extreme danger, and was hence peculiarly termed *ἱερά* or *sacra*, whence the proverb *sacram anchoram solvere*, as flying to the last refuge.

And such anchors have survived to our own day and in the very region about which the ancient legends of Ut-napishtim and "paradise" clustered, namely the Bahrein Islands in the Persian Gulf.

The sea between Manameh and Moharek is alive with strange craft: the *baghalow* of the Persian Gulf, with long prow decorated with shells, and huge grip, which makes it a boat easily turned in a squall; . . . many of them have curious shaped stone anchors, and water-casks of uniform and doubtless old-world shape. (J. Theodore Bent, "The Bahrein Islands, in the Persian Gulf [*Proc. Royal Geographical Society*, XII (1890), 4].)¹

It is not my wish to create the impression that my translation of *šūt-abni* by "anchors" will at once clear up all the obscurities in the

¹ My attention was called to this article by Rev. John Van Ess, American missionary at Basra, the other winter. While this article is before us, I may perhaps be permitted to refer to another episode in the Gilgamesh epic which may receive some light from a natural phenomenon described in the same article. I mean the episode in X, 287 f., where Gilgamesh ties heavy stones to his feet and is enabled thereby to dive down through the water (salt water) to the *apsû* below where he finds the plant named "the old man shall become young again." Scholars have been translating *apsû* by "fresh-water ocean" (*Süßwasser-ozean*) of late and, I believe, justifiably. I do not care to go into the pros and cons here. However, if the *apsû* did represent an "Okeanos" of fresh water, lying around, under and above the earth, one of the natural phenomena which might have led to the belief that fresh water underlies the salt water of the sea, may have been the sub-marine springs which Bent described (p. 7). "The town of Moharek gets its water supply from a curious source, springing up from under the sea. At high tide there is about a fathom of salt water over the spring, and water is brought up either by divers who go down with skins, or by pushing a hollow bamboo down into it. At low tide there is very little water over it, and women with large amphorae and goat skins, which look very real and lifelike though headless, wade out and fetch whatever water they require. The source is called Bir Mahab, and there are several of a similar nature on the coast around, the Kaseifah spring and others." Bent then tells of the legend connected with these springs, and goes on: "It is a curious fact that Arados, the Phoenician town on the Mediterranean, was supplied by a similar submarine source."

description of the voyage of Gilgamesh to the mouth of the rivers and back again. To say that my knowledge of things nautical is rudimentary would be putting it mildly. But there are things one can see without being a sailor.

It seems to be certain that we must assume, with Gressmann, that the poles cut by Gilgamesh were used as substitutes for the broken *šút-abni*. But it seems equally certain that a (not "the") hundred and twenty poles were used one after the other to keep the ship in its course through some Babylonian Scylla and Charybdis, or from running upon the rocks or sandbars. Gressmann assumed that one hundred and twenty was the total number of poles taken on board the vessel. But note that there is at least *one* pole left when Gilgamesh and Ur-shanabi start back, and with this pole Gilgamesh brings the departing ship back to shore once more (XI, 277 f.). Thus "the moment of tension" caused by the realization that the hundred and twenty poles will not make a suspension bridge long enough to reach from the ship to the shore, turns out to be nothing but another figment of the imagination. And the mast (I should prefer the translation "yard," for *karâ*¹) was taken down, not to piece out a landing bridge, but because they were almost up to the shore.

But how poles, used to keep a vessel in its course, could be a substitute for stone anchors remains to be considered. As said above, my nautical knowledge is embryonic, and I must confess that I have no answer to the question. One thinks of the use of the anchor in the process of "warping" a vessel. It seems possible that dragging stone anchors might have been used to keep a vessel in control. Herodotus, II, 96, speaking of the "vessels used in Egypt for the transport of merchandise," says:

These boats cannot make way against the current unless there is a brisk breeze; they are, therefore, towed up stream from the shore: down stream they are managed as follows. There is a raft belonging to each, made of the

¹ The translation "mast" for *karâ* in X, Col. IV, 11, is conjectural. So is the restoration of the verb in this sentence to *u-šak-[ki-ma]*, "he lifted up." And Gressmann's objection that the sails but not the mast would be taken down, furled, is well taken. But if we translate "yard" the objection has no force, and "putting up" the yard would make perfectly good sense.

wood of the tamarisk, fastened together with a wattling of reeds; and also a stone bored through the middle about two talents in weight. The raft is fastened to the vessel by a rope, and allowed to float down the stream in front, while the stone is attached by another rope astern [Rawlinson's footnote reads: A similar practice prevails to this day on the Euphrates]. The result is, that the raft, hurried forward by the current, goes rapidly down the river, and drags the "baris" (for so they call this sort of boat) after it; while the stone, which is pulled along in the wake of the vessel, and lies deep in the water, keeps the boat straight.¹

¹ I asked William F. Edgerton, Fellow in the department, who is studying ancient Egyptian boats, whether these had stone anchors, and he referred me to Ernst Assmann's discussion of this point in Borchardt's *Das Grabdenkmal Šaḥu-reʿ*, II, 153 f. Assmann feels sure that certain round objects which are part of the boats depicted on the walls of the Sahure temple are anchors. Borchardt's explanation of these objects does not seem at all convincing. If Assmann is right, and I believe he is, stone anchors on Egyptian vessels go back at least as far as about 2750 B.C. I have not been able to find anchors of any sort on the boats pictured in the Assyrian sculptures, neither do I recall having seen anything on the Euphrates or Tigris to substantiate the statement of Rawlinson in the above-mentioned footnote. I have no doubt that he is right. Ezekiel, chapter 27, gives a detailed description of the ships of Tyre, but mentions no anchors. This does not prove that they had none, any more than does their absence in the Assyrian sculptures.